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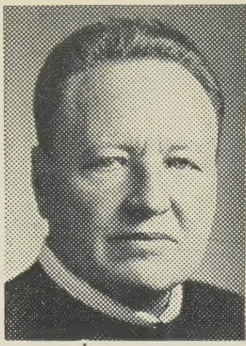
## Religious Education

Rev. Albert Shamon

## My Neighbor

Rosemary Haughton





IT SEEMS TO ME

## The Church Today

The latest pastoral of the Dutch bishops has wise things to say about renewal and confusion. Since to live is to change, they say, our only choice is between renewal and rigidity. Renewal is necessary and often untidy. After alterations in an old house, people must live with dust and rubbish for a while, but this is preferable to dwelling in a dilapidated structure. Besides, the Church—in many ways—is less like a permanent house than a tent for people on a journey.

The bishops freely admit that the Church has been anxious and suspicious regarding the achievements of the modern world. As a consequence, “a large part of the life and thought of the world has taken place more and more outside the Church, to the detriment of the message that the Church has to bring.”

Yet the deficiencies at every level in the Church are being corrected, and we are learning the need and the real significance of faith. Jesus himself experienced moments when he seemed to have been forsaken by God. What we need is the faith of an Abraham who knew only that God was supporting and directing him to a future that remained veiled.

The bishops see an advantage in the fact that the idea of God is no longer forced upon us by the modern world. Faith becomes purified; we bestir ourselves to search after God; and allow the Spirit to form our prayer; and we are less likely to build our safety merely on the certainties of this life.

They plead with Dutch Catholics to avoid un-Christian discord; to listen to each other; and to maintain communication even when legitimate differences arise. “Do not increase confusion by introducing insufficiently based novelties or un-reflected experiments. Do not condemn too hastily those who are sincerely looking for new and contemporary forms in which the faith can be meaningfully experienced. The deposit of faith is not dead capital we can safely preserve by burying it.”

JOHN T. MCGINN, C.S.P.

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Rev. Albert Shamon

# Three Components of Religious Education

## HINTS FOR TODAY'S CATECHISTS

A line has three parts: a beginning, middle, and an end. Religious education has a present, past and future; it is the product of three components: the *present*—the Church community, worshipping and teaching; the *past*—its heritage; and the *future*—its mission.

I suppose it would be good to start with a definition, despite our reaction to the Definitional Baltimore Catechism—a definition of what religious education is. What is it?

To put it simply, religious education is the passing on of the faith from generation to generation. (2 Tim. 1:12-13; 2 Thess. 2:15) For after all, why does the Church exist, why does the parish exist, why does the school exist? Is it not to spread the faith, to deepen the faith, to celebrate the faith? Could not the legend be written across almost every page of the Gospel, "I want faith." "Be it done to thee according to thy faith." "Dost thou *believe* this can be done to thee?" In other words, the whole problem of religious education revolves around faith: it is the tradition of faith. But before we can hand it on, we must first know, *What is faith?*

The Reformers seemed to empty faith of any intellectual content. They often reduced it to emotionalism, to the I've-got-faith revivalism, the enthusiasm of Wesley. In reaction, the Church insisted on the intellectuality of faith. She protested that faith is an assent of the intellect, under the movement of grace, to the truths re-

vealed by God. And as almost always happens in polemics, we read more into what the Church said than she meant. We reduced faith to just an act of the intellect, and religious education—the passing on of the faith—to the handing on of a body of truths. We reduced religious education to information and religious teaching to instruction. This was, to say the least, a violation of the integrity of man. We divided man, like Gaul, into three parts: body, soul, and intellect. Man is a man—a single, undivided person. He thinks, yes. But his thinking involves him totally: his feelings, his desires, his actions, himself.

### FAITH IS THE RESPONSE OF A PERSON TO A PERSON.

Before faith is an intellectual assent to truths, it is a response to a person. The Word of God is a living Person, not an abstraction; not something but Someone! When we say we have faith in somebody, what do we really mean? We mean we believe in him—believe in him, not just with our heads, but with all our heart and soul and strength. And because we believe in him, we trust him and accept all he says. In other words, faith arrows first to the person and then, and only then, to his message.

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For instance, suppose we are stranded on a desert island a-la-Robinson Crusoe. We wait, we hope, we pray for deliverance. Week follows week, and our desire begins to wane, to border on despair. Then one day someone calls to us. What is our instant reaction? We don't sit down and first analyze what he is saying, do we? A voice to us means only one thing—a person, somebody. And in these particular circumstances, the voice brings with it hope, salvation, rescue. What is our first response? Is it not joy? The voice says in effect, "I bring you news of great joy." Our next reaction is to race and leap with joy into the arms of the person who called out. Only after that, do we finally get around to listening to how our rescuer chanced to find us and why he came to this island, and how he will save us.

And so faith is first a person's response—the response of our total selves, not just our intellects—to a Person, not just to truths about him.

Not what, but *Whom!*

For Christ is more than all the creeds,

And His full life of gentle deeds

Shall all the creeds outlive.

Not what I do believe, but *Whom!*

Not what,

but *Whom!*

(John Oxenham, "Credo.")

Thus we say, "I believe IN God," not "I believe God." Because I believe in God, I believe Him and everything He tells me. Faith in a person precedes intellectual assent to truths.

What does all this mean in regard to religious education?

First of all it confirms what we already have said, namely, that religious education must be more than instruction—for faith is more than the response of the intellect to truths. Faith is a personal encounter, between a living God and a living man, like that between God and Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. Therefore, faith is first of all a long, long process. For persons do not get to know each other at the first encounter. Thus young couples, taking each other seriously, go steady. Thus Aristotle said to become friends persons must eat a bushel of salt together; that is, must have many, many meals together. Religious education,

therefore, must never be equated with, or limited to, Catholic schooling. The two are not identical. Schooling begins with school. But religious education must begin at birth—at the moment the child can respond to his environment; and it continues to deepen past adolescence and old age. In other words, religious education is a cradle-to-grave affair. Therefore, the Catholic school is not at all the major part of the religious education picture, although it is a mighty important part of that picture. Pre-school and post-school education are equally important. In the future, we shall have to see that our resources are more proportionately expended to the pre-school and adult levels of Christian growth as well as to the school age level.

### CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

In the second place, since faith is a person's response to a Person, it is basically a relationship and an experience—an experiential relationship. Therefore, the role of the Christian community is all-important in religious education. Only in a community are interpersonal relationships possible. Only through interpersonal relationships can one become a person, fully human. How does a child learn before it goes to school? By living in the community of the family. A child learns more from its living at home than from its instructions there. Instructions are important, but at that age level, not so important as the teaching and learning that goes on with living.

Christ established His kingdom on earth as a family. In the New Testament the word used to describe what happens to persons in the Christian faith is adoption; and "adoption" suggests a family, a community—one is adopted by a family. Baptism is the sacrament of adoption, the entrance into the Christian community. As the child begins to assimilate the traditions and heritage of the family from the moment of its adoption, so religious education begins from the moment of baptism. And this passing on of the faith, which is Religious Education, is sought in the Christian community. When the sponsors bring the baby to be baptized, the first question the priest asks is, "What do you ask of the Church of



God?" And the sponsors answer, "Faith." The child comes to the Christian community for faith. If the Christian community does not have faith, will the child have faith? The Christian community is a worshipping and a teaching community. In Acts 2:42, after Pentecost had given the apostles new insights into the faith, we read of the early Christian community that "they continued steadfastly in prayer, the teaching of the Apostles and the breaking of the bread. . . ."

### TEACHING COMMUNITY

We are not concerned with the worshipping Christian community but with the teaching Christian community—the school. How best can the school transmit the faith? In grades from one to three, I would say perhaps quite formally, for the child needs proper direction and orientation. But once the child's steps are turned in the right direction, then in the intermediate years, let us say grades four to seven, his faith should be allowed to grow in the way best suited to the child at this age level; namely, by his experiencing it, by living in a truly Christian community. The child must meet Christ at this level, not so much in textbooks as in persons. A spirit is caught quicker than taught. Christ must become a living reality; and He can only through living persons. Christianity must become a living experience; and it can only through a Christian community of persons. In the Parable of the Sower, where did Christ put the stress? Was it not on the soil, the environment, the milieu, the community in which the seed lived?

Hence, Gabriel Moran has made a startling suggestion. He advocates no formal religious instruction in the middle elementary years. In an article "Religion is for Adults" he says, speaking of the intermediate years:

"... children ought simply be allowed to grow up. The Catholic school ought to provide a truly human and Christian atmosphere in which they can grow. . . . THE MILIEU IS THE CHIEF FORMATIVE INFLUENCE, and the function of the Catholic school at this level is to be a 'citadel of charity.'"

In fact, this is one of the best arguments for Catholic schools, yet the one least used; namely, it is able to create a Christian community where the child can get a Catholic mind almost by the process of osmosis. This does not mean there should be no instruction in these grades from four to seven, but that it need not be formal instruction. In the home the child is taught, is he not, by word or explanation, given as the occasion arises, as well as by example? So in these intermediate years, the faith lived by the Christian community of the school and taught as the occasion arises would inculcate right attitudes and ideals far better than mere book learning. And Christian attitudes at this age are more important than right answers.

I say this not as necessarily endorsing the dropping of formal religious instruction, from grades four to seven, but rather to set your minds at ease when current religious textbooks seem devoid of definition or seem a bit nebulous or intangible.

### TWO-FOLD DEFECT

The great fault with religious education in the past, if there was fault is, as I see it, twofold: (1) we reduced it to definitions and (2) we tried to impart too much.

As for definitions, they are the culmination of knowledge. Only after one knows a thing perfectly can he define it. Definition is the last step in the learning process. And we would put it first—(Baltimore Catechism).

Piaget conducted many studies on the development of thinking. He presented a great deal of evidence to support the conclusion that formal thought does not appear until eleven or twelve years of age.

The Stanford-Binet and Wechsler intelligence text booklets pointed to the same conclusion: "conceptual thinking, *in a consistent and sustained way*, before eleven to thirteen years of age is not possible."

Piaget, Gesell, Kohlberg, Brunner caused Robert O'Neill and Father Donovan in a paper on *Psychological Development and the Concept of Mortal Sin* to conclude that the "age of reason," defined in terms of cognitive development sufficient to enable the child to comprehend concepts, group



relationships, and understand distinctions, occurs at the onset of adolescence—i.e., between 11 and 13 years of age in most children. (How true! A child for instance, who has not been to confession for 6 months can tell little more than the “sins” of the day or the morning before.)

As for *doctrinal content*, we gave the child too much. We cultivated in teachers an agenda anxiety—a feverish fear that we must cover all the matter of religion in grammar school or else all is lost—as though the salvation of the student depended on that. What we labor so painstakingly to inject in the fifth grade, could be picked up easily and readily at a higher level, when it would be more meaningful. If it is not meaningful at the fifth grade level, is not the child apt to think religion will not be meaningful at any other level?

So the first great ingredient in religious education is the living Christian community, making Christ visible and present in teacher and pupils—giving the child the one lesson he best can learn at this age; the lesson from experience.

### PROGRESSIVE DISCOVERY

The second component of religious education regards the past: it is the appropriation of our Christian heritage. Christian faith expresses itself in beliefs and doctrines. But this expression or definition of our faith is the final step in a threefold process. Faith begins with an *event*, not with a doctrine. Christianity began with an event, not a philosophy; with somebody, not something. The event evokes the *response* of faith. Faith lived is finally *formulated*. Thus Israel's faith began with the Exodus-event: God's intervention in behalf of His people; Christian faith began with the *resurrection-event*: Christ's passing from death to life. These interventions were followed by the response of *faith*—belief in the person encountered. Only later came the formulation of their faith: the Passover narrations, that crystallized into much of the *Old Testament*; and the faith of the early Christian communities, that was later embodied in the four *Gospels*. We, however, tended to reverse this process. We formulated the faith first; then we defined

it for the child; and then we hopefully expected that somehow he would live up to the definitions. Then, finally maybe he would experience the Christ-event.

But even in this second aspect of religious education—the appropriation of our Christian heritage—again the aim is not indoctrination, to hand out packaged information. In the Passover celebration, there comes a point *in the meal* when the youngest child asks the head of the home what is the feast all about. The father replies by narrating the history of Israel. But note: the child is already experiencing the Passover event. Similarly, religious education must be the appropriation of a heritage being already lived out by the child—living, praying, and worshipping in the Christian community. Hence religious education should be programmed for discovery rather than for instruction. The aim is CONVERSION, an actual change of heart and mind.

### GOD'S INTERIOR ACTION

This requires, besides the patience of the teacher and the prayerfulness of both teacher and students, *interior action on the part of God, for He alone can illumine minds and change hearts*. Commenting on the words of Samuel—“Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth,” Thomas à Kempis remarked:

“Let not Moses nor any of the prophets speak to me, but speak Thou rather, O Lord God, . . . for Thou alone can perfectly instruct men, but they without Thee avail me nothing.

“They may indeed sound forth words, but they give not the spirit. They speak well, but if Thou be silent they do not set the heart on fire.

“They deliver the letter, but Thou discloseth the sense. They publish mysteries, but Thou explainest the meaning of the thing signified.

“They declare the commandments, but Thou enablest us to keep them. They show the way, but Thou givest strength to walk in it. They cry out with words, but Thou givest understanding to hearing.

“Let not then Moses speak to me, but Thou. . . (Imit. 3:2). ‘I have planted, Apol-



los watered, but God has given the growth.'” (1 Cor. 3:6).

The third component of religious education regards the future: religious education is for mission. The Christian community is by nature missionary. The faith is not given us for hoarding. The man who buried his talent lost it. Israel was chosen, not for privilege, but for mission—she was to be a light of revelation to the Gentiles. When she was not, God rejected her; and His Son chose in her place the Twelve—not from the rabbinical schools, nor from Jewish officialdom—but from the unlettered, the untutored, fishermen! He would not put new wine in old wineskins. He chose 12 to symbolize that here was a new Israel—again chosen for mission: to be a light of revelation to the Gentiles. “I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what would I but that it be enkindled.”

Rev. Richard Wurmbbrand in his book *Tortured for Christ* wrote: “We should never stop at having won a soul for Christ. By this, you have done only half the work. Every soul won for Christ must be made to be a soul-winner” (p. 16).

### A FAITH SHARED

Speaking of the instructions given to young communists, Douglas Hyde wrote: “He will be made to feel right from the start of the very first session that instruction is not an end in itself. . . . He is made to understand that the knowledge he gains will be . . . something to be used, not just absorbed. And he can see that this is not just words for all around him are people who are living the Communism he is being taught” (*Dedication and Leadership*, p. 49). It was Lenin who said that “theory without action is sterile; and action without theory is stupid.”

Father Gerard Sloyan wrote in *Christ the Lord*: “If we don’t spread the good news about Christ’s victory over death and sin, it soon stops meaning much to us. . . . We don’t pray enough—to the Holy Spirit for light and guidance. We don’t read enough—of God’s love for us in the Bible. We, twentieth century disciples don’t fulfill our duty of confirmation enough—by telling the good news to others” (pp. 15-6).

This missionary aspect of religious education has been the facet of education most neglected. The great fault of religious education in the past has been that it was too **INTROVERTED**. Concerned about developing Christian character and Christian institutions, it too often drew persons out of the world instead of driving them into the world, where Christian witness and service could mean something.

It was this aspect of religious education that Bishop Sheen was most concerned about when he ordered a revision of the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation. In his letter on this matter our Bishop spoke of three views of the world:—

### CHURCH AND WORLD

*The world before Vatican I* (1870) which viewed the world as evil, as tantamount to worldliness and the church to a bulwark, a mighty fortress, defending herself against the world, seated proudly on a mountaintop, secure in her retreat. Once in a while she would send out a “scalping party” to get converts and bring them back to safety within her.

*The view before Vatican II* (1962) which saw the world as a *pie* cut into sectors: one to the Church, one to the political sphere, one to the economic, etc. The Church was mixed up with the world as a sector of it. Therefore, Pius XI sought to leaven the other sectors by Catholic Action.

*After Vatican II*, the world was pictured as a circle: the center of it was the Church. The world in this view was not looked upon as something evil, but as a cosmos, a thing of beauty; as God’s creation and so something good; something to be divinized and transformed. A world from which God did not remain aloof, but entered and risked His life to leaven. Father Bernard Cooke calls this an *experiential* faith: a sharing with others our faith in Christ (“The Challenge of Vatican II,” p. 37).

Therefore, Christ did two things: His first word was “Come, follow me.” He gathered His apostles, took them out of the world—to educate them. His last word was “Go, teach all nations.” *The purpose of the gathering was for mission.*

All religious education must have this



ultimate orientation. Just as the seminary courses are all pointed to the priesthood, so all religious education should be pointed to Confirmation: the climax of the lay priesthood, the official deputation of the layman to go out and bring God to the world and the world to God.

Some Protestant Churches are already structuring their religion courses so they will ultimately evoke this response of Christian commitment in Confirmation. Only religious education for mission can fit one to make an act of Confirmation like this one demanded by some Protestant Churches:—

### CONFIRMATION DIALOGUE

*Leader:* As through this Love Feast you are joined anew to God, so you are delivered from yourself, and from those powers which would make a slave of you. What are you delivered to? Is there a purpose in God's deliverance of you?

*People:* Yes. I am freed from myself for the world. Jesus Christ declares me to be a free person, but I am freed for a mission to the world. I am called to love that world, even as I am loved, knowing that I am not alone, but that God suffers with me in the midst of the world. God is waiting for me in the midst of it all; waiting for me to come. Each moment of every day he is waiting for me to be about his business, down Main Street, a country road, a slum alley, thirty floors up in an apartment building, on a tractor thirty acres from nowhere, in Mississippi, in the church building.

*Leader:* It is a world filled with the pain of birth and death, paralyzed by the anxiety of life; a world that cries out! Do you hear the world's cries?

*People:* Yes, I do.

*Leader:* Will you respond to those cries?

*People:* Yes, I will.

*Leader:* How will you respond to the cries of the world?

*People:* By the giving of myself in service.

*Leader:* And how will you give yourself in service?

*People:* I will go into the world and love. I am weak, yet God's love makes me

strong. Though I may be despised, yet I will love, for I know the love that can heal and restore. I will go into the world and love."

Wouldn't it be wonderful for our religious education to be so geared as to climax in such a commitment!

To sum up, Religious Education involves three things:

*LIVING THE FAITH:* that is, getting involved in the Christian community, worshipping and teaching.

*LEARNING THE FAITH:* that is, appropriating the Christian heritage, through formal teaching.

*LEAVENING THE WORLD:* that is, getting involved in the world to transform it.

In conclusion, let us meditate a moment on one of Israel's most educated Jews: Saul of Tarsus. Saul was proud of his traditional religion. He was so sure of himself. He detested all innovation. Then Christ came. Saul had his own ideas of God, and Jesus—a common carpenter—did not fit in with them. Jesus was unorthodox, and Saul's religion was the orthodox one. Indignant, Saul persecuted the followers of Jesus. "Saul had so well defined God, he no longer took the trouble to listen to him." He became a fanatic. The only way to change the mind of a fanatic is to use lightning. In a flash, Saul was blinded, converted. His catechism was a single sentence: the revelation of a person: "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Saul learned that God was not a doctrine one studied and imposed, but a living person—Jesus. Not a dead Jesus, but a living Jesus. Not a Jesus way up there, but a Jesus right down here, who could be persecuted. Not a stranger Jesus, but a Jesus who knew his name, "Saul, Saul."

Saul, who was to evangelize the nations, learned that he had to beg instructions from a simple disciple, Ananias, whose only superiority over Saul was he belonged to the Christian community. "The hand of God made Paul blind, but it was from the hands of a believer that he was to recover his sight." Even the weakest of us can pass on the faith. But it is a long, long process—a deep, deep experience—in fact, "faith is a life spent in discovering God."



Rosemary Haughton

# Who Is My Neighbor?

*THE CHARITY THAT BUILDS AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY*

Recently a clever advertisement by a firm that makes building material showed people shut off from each other in a block of flats as if they were each in the drawers of a huge, impersonal filing system. The point of the advertisement was to show that good planning of houses and flats is not just an extra for human beings but makes the quality of their lives. That advertisement might well be pinned up in Christian homes all over the country.

From time to time in the press we read pathetic stories of people found dead in their small flats or tenements, sometimes many days after they had died. Nobody knew, and nobody cared. Only the milkman noticed the accumulating bottles on the doorstep, or the man came to read the gas-meter and couldn't get a reply.

It is not only old people who suffer terribly from loneliness, though it is often worse for them because they haven't the buoyancy of youth to help them, they have nothing to hope for or look forward to. But in every city there are also young people, students or young workers, living in tenements, far from home. Sometimes one of them commits suicide from the depression caused by acute loneliness, often they try to find a way of relieving this loneliness which only makes things worse. The increasing use of drugs among young people is often due to this need for escape from loneliness, and sexual promiscuity frequently grows from the same root. Any kind of companionship, any kind of escape, is better than none.

It isn't just being alone that makes people lonely. Young mothers of small children, living in shiny new houses in well-planned estates sometimes suffer agonies of loneliness and depression, and mental hospitals are familiar with the results of this. And even people who seem to have lots of acquaintances, and to be very talkative and cheerful, can be hiding painful and embittering problems because they feel sure that no one really cares enough to listen to them.

Loneliness is a terrible word, and in one way we could say that it is the real enemy of human life. It means that people are cut off from each other, they cannot love or be loved. But without love human life is not human. Without love people wither and die spiritually—and physically, too, in the end.

A baby in a "Home" is generally slower, less responsive, less adventurous, than a baby at home. Nowadays we are more aware of how much love, real felt love, has to do with a child's development, so this sad situation is changing, but the slow, apathetic behavior of young children brought up without the love and care of one person who is "theirs" shows very clearly that it is love that makes human beings.

And this love is God's love—it is only by loving and being loved that the spirit of God can work in people. So people who are shut in by loneliness in any form are

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From "Problems of Christian Marriage."

*Courtesy of Paulist Press Deus Books. 304 West 58th St., New York, N.Y. 10019*



also shut away from God. All these lonely people need one thing—love, although the ways in which they need love are infinitely variable.

When someone asked Christ, "Who is my neighbor?" he answered it with the story of the good Samaritan, which shows that my neighbor is simply anyone who needs me. This need may be for anything from a cup of tea and a chat to massive changes in national legislation. The need includes things like town-planning, and good sanitation, recreation centers and so on. It includes ordinary hospitality, and extends to the extra and really difficult help that may be needed by some family or person over a long period. It may include the giving of time, money, effort. Whatever form this service of other people takes it is really, in the end, the giving of love, because even such an apparently impersonal thing as good planning of a block of flats (as in the advertisement I referred to) is really to do with making it possible for people to live together, to get to know each other. It makes it possible for people to love each other.

### COMMUNITY OF LOVE

But creating the material conditions for people to get to know each other isn't enough. You can't build love with bricks, or legislate for it, though you can make buildings and laws that help or hinder love. The giving of love is something that only people can do. But there is one body of people who are openly committed to loving, and helping others to love, so that of course they have a special responsibility in combating all the things in human life which cut people off from love.

These people are Christians. They know that love in human life is God in human life, and that man without love is man without God. The Church of Christ is dedicated to the breaking down of barriers between people, so that the spirit of God who is love may be able to work in them. This is the good news that Christians are bound to preach—the news that these barriers can be broken down, and that God can transform human life, if only we will let him. Because we are Christians we want to

share this knowledge with other people—to help them to realize God's love in their own lives.

But all around us are people to whom the Christian message does not seem to be a message of love. Lack of love shuts them in with themselves, they cannot see or hear the words that bring a message from God. It is the lack of love from Christians past and present that has made the words of the Gospel a mockery to them. To the heart hardened by fear of loneliness, the uncertainty of human loyalties, or the unhappiness of wasted effort, the words cannot penetrate. To the heart stifled with the pre-occupations of keeping up appearances, the boredom of a dull job, or resentment at the fortunes of others, the words of love have no meaning. Yet we are still summoned, by our baptism, to preach the Gospel, and if the words that mean so much to us mean nothing to the people who need God's love then we must preach the Gospel in other ways.

### WORDS AND DEEDS

When words are no use, actions can preach. This does not mean "doing good" simply as an excuse to make converts. It means, rather, that Christian "preaching" (our showing people what kind of person Christ is) comes from our love of Christ and of other people. This is because those who know Christ cannot bear to keep their knowledge of him to themselves but are impelled to share it. This preaching of the Gospel is the sharing of love with all those who need it, and that means everyone. At all times both word and act have been part of this preaching, from the time when Christ himself healed and forgave in the same gesture of love.

So the preaching of the Gospel is a matter of communicating the love of God in whatever way is *possible*, by word or action or, more often, both. But in our society there is a strong resistance to Christian *words*, partly because of the way they have been misused in the past. Therefore, an even greater importance falls on effective (which means really loving) Christian *actions*.

Other people may be able to find ex-



cuses for themselves if they do nothing to fight the things that prevent love; Christians can have no excuse, the command of Christ is too clear.

Throughout the history of Christianity, when Christians took seriously the need to preach Christ by their practical love and service, and therefore to tackle seriously some urgent human need, they did it most effectively by organizing themselves into groups with common aims. Religious orders and congregations are the obvious examples of this sensible idea, and lay organizations, from local groups to international bodies, show that Christian charity is not a lovely feeling but a down-to-earth intention to get something done.

### MUTUAL HELP

The reason for this is not simply that it is easier in this way to arrange sensibly the distribution of money, time, and effort so as to get the job done as efficiently as possible. This is important (the amount of effort that is wasted when organization is amateurish can almost cancel out what is achieved). But deeper than this is the help that people get from each other when they work together at something they feel is important.

This need to join together in the work of the Gospel is, indeed, built into Christianity. The Eucharist is "the bread which we share," and it is by sharing in Christ that we become able to preach his Gospel.

What each Christian can do is his sharing in the Church's work.

Yet this sharing begins in each individual person. Although organizations, large and small, are a normal and essential way to make Christian love effective, there are many (perhaps most) people in the Church who cannot join an official organization, or don't want to. Yet the human and Christian fact remains that people need each other in order to grow up as Christians.

The Church is a body of people who understand that God is active, for all men's good, in our world, and want to spread that knowledge. We are a sign to all men of the reality of God's love in human life. That is what being a Christian means.

Every act towards another human being

either brings the other into touch (even ever so little) with Christ, or it shuts Christ out (even ever so little) from him. So Christians try to make every action, as far as possible, Christ-bearing. And although this may, and does, lead to huge efforts and achievements in practical help for those in need, it begins "at home," that is, in the individual Christian's attitude to individual other people. Our attitude to them should be based on what we learn at the heart of our own Christian life: from the Eucharist, "the bread which we *share*." This simple fact of sharing a meal is a clear sign of the way Christians should live with other people. We are to share ourselves, as Christ shared, and shares, himself.

Why we should help our neighbor is quite clear, but "how" can be less obvious. The practical "how" is shown by the many and urgent needs that confront anyone with their eyes open, all the different ways in which people need love and care in order to learn to love and be loved. But it is not so easy to bridge the gap between the person who wants to help and the person who needs help. This isn't just a question of letting people know when something needs to be done. People have to see, also, how they themselves really can do something about it. Here is an example.

### HOW TO GIVE

Mrs. Smith lives in a block of overcrowded flats and sometimes has heard sounds of crying from the flat next door. She knows that the couple who live there have rows, and she knows that their children are dirty and unkempt and smell and have a bad reputation. She is fairly certain that money is at the back of all this—she has heard that the husband is apt to be quarrelsome and to lose his job as a result. She is sorry for his wife and would like to help. But her own husband is a clever and ambitious young man: he is trying to get on and feels that living in this flat is only temporary, he will soon do better. Meanwhile, he likes to keep their own family life separate from the things he doesn't like about some of his neighbors. Mrs. Smith enjoys keeping her flat spotless and pretty, her two children are well kept and good-



mannered, and she feels that what she has achieved for her family is worth having and fighting for.

Yet she has a tender heart and a Christian conscience. Her neighbors are her responsibility and she doesn't want her children to grow up selfish, either. What is she to do?

It would be easy if she could just give money. She might find it difficult to spare, but there would be a certain satisfaction in it, a sense of duty done and even a sense of superiority. But although the wife next door might accept it, her husband would be angry and the domestic situation would probably become worse rather than better. What the poor girl really needs is sympathy and friendship, since most of her neighbors shun her as a slut and a nuisance. But then, Mrs. Smith thinks anxiously, suppose she began to ask her neighbor in for a cup of tea, and let their children play together, what would her own husband say, and what about the effect on her own children? There's no doubt that the neighbor's children would teach them bad language if not worse—and they seem to scratch their heads rather a lot.

### DIFFICULT CHOICE

This is the sort of thing that happens to most of us sometime or other. We see something that needs to be done, but we aren't quite sure if we are the ones to do it.

Which is more important? The good life Mrs. Smith and her family have made for themselves, and the need to keep things peaceful for her husband, and protect her children from bad influences—or the little she might be able to do for her neighbors. After all, it is doubtful whether they really want her friendship. They might think she was just interfering.

These are very real difficulties, and it is not selfishness alone that makes people hesitate. There are as many difficulties in really trying to share, as there are people in need of love.

It is because such choices are neither clear nor easy that it is so important for children to learn to take the idea of sharing and loving people for granted, from the beginning. Otherwise as they get older there

seem to be more and more reasons for not doing very much. We easily get to feel afraid of the needs of others. "I've got my career to consider." "Once you start you can't stop." "I don't care for myself, it's the children I'm thinking of." "It wouldn't do any good." "This is only papering over the cracks, it's the system that's wrong." "I've got enough worries of my own already." These are some of the reasons we often give for not doing what we can see needs doing. They *can* be just a coverup for selfishness; they can also be perfectly honest, coming from a real uncertainty about what matters most.

It is true that the new and precarious career *does* matter, that individual acts of charity are no substitute for thorough reform, that the weight of one's own worry may well make anything else "the last straw," and so on.

### BEGIN EARLY

The only way to make sure that grown-up Christians have a sensible and Christian kind of conscience with which to decide these difficult questions is to give the child the chance to realize what sharing love means, as he grows.

If my imaginary Mrs. Smith (there are thousands like her) really wanted to tackle the problem of her neighbors, she would probably begin to see, after a while, that it would really be a help to her own children to have a chance to make friends with their neighbors. They would get to know each other as playmates, and learn from each other about their different lives and problems, which perhaps they had never heard of. This would far outweigh the risks of bad language or head-lice, nasty as they both are. The way of thinking that has made the word "charity" almost an insult is one that makes it possible for people to give *things*—money, or clothes, or time—without giving themselves. They could keep themselves apart, and yet feel they had done their duty. But children don't have this attitude unless grown-ups teach it to them.

They find it hard to give—things, time and trouble, the sacrifice of personal wishes—as we all do, but once their interest and sympathy have been roused they can be



generous in a perfectly unself-conscious way which is real sharing, because in fact they gain as much as they give. The willingness to care, and care actively, needs to be helped a lot because selfishness is easier, but it can and does become a habit. So, when the children grow up, and come across some need, they will *first of all* have the desire and will to help, and then, afterwards, they can consider sensibly and prudently any difficulties there may be in the way. If it is this way round they will be prepared to overcome the difficulties if possible, or if they really cannot be overcome, they will not need to keep on thinking up excuses for pulling out, in order to make themselves feel better. They will be free to consider what can be done by someone else, or by indirect methods. They will give sympathy and friendliness when they can do no more, and over and over again this is the most important part of helping.

But people whose first reaction is to be afraid to get involved, perhaps for excellent reasons, cannot give even interest or sympathy, because that makes them feel guilty. (It can make people feel so bad that they abuse the person who needs help! Some Victorians condemned the "lower classes" for drunkenness, coarseness, brutality, and so on, to justify the appalling conditions which they were not prepared to tackle. We still hear echoes of this attitude in the mouths of people who assure each other that colored immigrants "like" to live in squalid, overcrowded rooms without proper washing facilities.)

### INVOLVING CHILDREN

But bringing up children with a sense of responsibility is not something we set out to do as if Christian love were a sort of lesson. It is something that happens, if the parents care about other people, and simply let the children share their concern as far as they can. Even if the children are not able to help actively, they can share by interest and sympathy and prayer. Prayer is sharing, too. It is opening the heart to God, and that means to "the least of these my brethren." Then, when action is possible, it seems a natural and inevitable thing, with

no artificial feeling of doing a virtuous action, or "doing my duty." It just happens, because mind and heart have learned to react in this way.

Learning the meaning of Christian sharing goes all the way from sharing a new train-set with one's younger brother to huge social and political reforms. But one exercise of responsibility that comes within the reach of even the most homebound people is "neighborliness," a word which reminds us again of Christ's answer to the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

### SENSE OF BELONGING

To go back to the example I began with, planners of new towns have learned from bitter experience that it isn't enough to put up rows and rows of nice little houses. People need to feel they "belong," and the newest towns are planned in "neighborhoods," with their own amenities, in units small enough to enable people to feel they know each other and belong together. This is a thoroughly Christian idea. People need to share their lives in order to develop properly as human beings. (They need reasonable privacy as well, and overcrowding is horribly destructive of right human values, but this is because modern life is complicated, and relationships subtle and often difficult. Living in a community is hard work, and everyone needs to change to draw back and rest and reflect, and see from "outside" how best to live "inside" the community. This means that privacy is not *better than* living with people; it is *part of* living successfully with other people.)

Christian families can do a great deal to make a community *feel* like a community or "neighborhood." They can help each other by baby-sitting—by looking after each others' children for a few hours, for a day, or even for several days so that a couple can get a much-needed holiday. Those with a spare room can "put up" a neighbor's visiting friends. "Cooperative baking or bottling or sewing sessions make dull jobs easier for young wives. The expert do-it-yourself father can show other people's children as well as his own how to make and mend (and his dressmaking wife could do the same). Shared holidays, when parents



can take turns to take charge of the children, can mean a holiday for parents as well as children—so many mothers return from a holiday longing for a rest! Families can invite in single people—students, or old people, or anyone who is living the deadening tenement kind of life; and single people can offer their services to families, or their friendship to other lonely people.

This all sounds rather trivial and obvious, yet this kind of thing—which is by no means a Christian monopoly—can make the difference between loneliness (even to the point of despair and suicide) and the feeling of belonging, of being someone who matters, that makes life worth living. And it is this feeling of being valued that makes it possible to “give” in their turn; to open their hearts to men and to God. Christians start with the knowledge that they matter. God loves them, the life and death and triumph of Christ are the measure of how much we matter. This is why it is only right and natural that the Christian should be the one who takes the lead in helping others to realize their own value, whether by word or act. We have so much to share.

### GETTING STARTED

The making of a neighborhood of people and not just of buildings is the aim of Christians living in any settled community. There are other ways of sharing the life of Christ, but for most people this is at least the beginning. And in a neighborhood there are, or should be, all kinds of people with all sorts of incomes and of every age. Neither money nor age is the insuperable barrier it is often held to be. It is right and natural that people who live in the same sort of way, or are of similar age, should seek each other's company. They have much in common and can share very easily, both by sympathy and practical help. Just talking is a real pleasure and even luxury. But there is also great benefit from sharing across these natural divisions, and, although it is more difficult, the failure to do so can result in making the groups who *do* have much in common so shut in and defensive that they lose much of the good that comes from their own sharing. As soon as you start setting limits to love you begin to lose

it, as the servant in the parable found, who did not dare to risk using the money entrusted to him by his master. He wrapped it up safely—but in the end he found that he had lost it—“even that which he hath shall be taken away.” This is not a threat but a simple statement of psychological fact.

### ACROSS CLASSES

This sharing across the natural (and useful) barriers is never a one-way traffic. Those who are fairly well-off do not only give by being “neighborly” with people who have to manage on less. The fact of the children playing together, or friendly “dropping-in,” of *asking* for bits of help from those to whom something has been given so that *both* sides feel “needed”—these things create a real relationship from which both benefit enormously. It helps a lot if we are willing to ask for help ourselves. This is often more difficult than giving help, yet a sensitive and lonely person may often be deeply pleased by being asked for a bit of help, when to be offered help might have hurt feelings that are already rather raw with the sense of neglect. It may be something quite tiny—to borrow some milk or the performance of some small errand. To be needed in some way is a marvelous experience for those who have begun to feel that nobody has any use for them. The better off learn to be less smug, not to take for granted what they have, to admire the courage of those who live in ways they would find very hard. And the less well-off are relieved of the burden of feeling cut-off. New ideas and opportunities can be opened to them, and (because they know that they are dealing with friends and neighbors) they can enjoy these opportunities. In theory we may think that a “classless” society is the ideal. But whatever may be achieved in the future we have a class situation now, and have to live with it. In that case the Christian's work is to make the distinctions irrelevant. People whose lives are similar will always be drawn to each other, but we can see to it that they are not shut in with each other.

The same applies to age-groups. The separation of a community into rigid age-groups is another thing that makes it more



difficult to love and share. The young want to be with the young, but when they are allowed to assume that they must therefore despise and shut out their elders, the result can only be an unbalanced, unloving outlook. The hostility of so many young people is due to fear. They are afraid of the world which their elders have created, and they have not been helped to feel themselves at home in it. So they cling together in suspicious and angry defensiveness.

At the other end of life the old resent the callousness of the younger people. Their fear of being lonely and neglected, shut out either physically or psychologically, makes them demanding, irritable and unreasonable. And middle-aged or young married couples create this situation because they see in the old people the end that they secretly fear. They try to shut out this fear by shutting out the old from their hearts and even their lives. This is a totally unhuman and un-Christian state of affairs.

### SHARING OURSELVES

When these barriers of fear and suspicion are crossed, everyone benefits. The young need to be appreciated and needed and valued by older people, then they find their place and cease to resent their elders. Their sense of security is supported by a sense of belonging, not only to their own age-groups but to a wider community. The parents watch their children grow up with pleasure, and can cease to be afraid of old age because the bonds of love are not snapped by the years. And the old can relax, enjoy grandchildren. These can be real or proxy—"substitute" grandparents—older people who live nearby—are a benefit to family life which could be enormously helpful to young families whose own parents live far away. This is one way to help older people to feel that they are valued, and able to bring to the community the balance that comes from a long view. The men and women in "old people's homes" who have a blank look and seem bitter and withdrawn are often simply people who have been allowed to feel that they no longer matter to anyone. Put the same person in a setting where there are normal and loving contacts with all ages, and you would hardly recog-

nize them. The barriers between age groups are barriers of fear. The teaching of the Gospel is that "perfect love casts out fear."

The creation of a real neighborhood is Christian neighborliness at grass-roots level. From there it can go anywhere. A community that is a community, a real neighborhood, can tackle problems on a big scale. One small town has, as a body, tackled the problem of mental illness and revolutionized treatment by having non-violent patients living in ordinary families, and free to walk around or work when they can. The rate of successful treatment has risen and even the incurable have their place, as valued members of the community. This sort of thing need not be unique, as it is in this case. It is one example of what neighborliness really means.

### LONG OUTREACH

"My neighbor" is the person nearest to one who happens to need help. Neighborliness doesn't end there, but this is where it begins. "But there is no limit to the 'nearest.' It reaches from 'nearest' to 'nearest' to the ends of the earth . . . The love of God, which he came to bring us, which he wishes us to have in our hearts, ought to embrace the whole world; and at the same time, we ought to start fulfilling it, without any romanticizing, in whatever is nearest, whatever we can do most immediately and most quickly." These are the words of the Abbé Pierre, and his life shows the truth of them.

The Abbé Pierre has accomplished a huge work for the homeless all over the world, but it all began because he said an emphatic "yes" to the need that happened to be nearest to him. He never set out to build houses for the homeless. He thought of having a center for youthwork, and bought a huge shabby old house for this. Then a homeless ex-convict tramp turned up, so he took him in. Several more social outcasts drifted his way, and he took them in too. But after a while he and his rag-pickers (that was what they did for a living—sorting through rubbish dumps) realized that ordinary, decent families, and not just tramps, were homeless. They put up one or two families in the house, but the word got



around, and soon the Abbé was dealing with a stream of people near to despair. It's a long, marvelous story, but briefly what the Abbé did was to get together with his rag-pickers and *build* the houses *themselves* that these people couldn't buy or rent. The garbage pickers, the outcasts of society had found vital work to do, and were doing something that badly needed doing. But of course it wasn't nearly enough. It was against the law, this unofficial building, and there were constant battles, but they were won, the houses went up, a few families found dignity and hope.

### TRAGIC DEATH

Then the terrible winter of 1954 came. A bill to provide emergency housing had been put before the Assembly by members working with the Abbé. It was turned down. That very night, a baby died of cold in the patched old caravan which was all the shelter the Abbe and his friends could provide just then for one young family. The news of this stung people's consciences, and they listened when the Abbé appealed for help. He asked the people to recognize their neighbors—he asked those who had to give to those who hadn't. Huge tents were lent and put up, the homeless were collected from streets and doorways and cellars and given at least some warmth and shelter. Families who had room took in homeless families and individuals. The whole country realized what appalling things had been going on under their noses, and many, many people gave, not only money but immense

personal effort. That was only the beginning. In the end—by bullying and propaganda and refusing to take no for an answer—the Abbé and his friends did get some legislation, new houses were built, and also a huge movement began which has now spread all over the world.

I have quoted this single example because it shows the whole range of what it means to ask, "Who is my neighbor?" and then to listen to Christ's answer. This effort of practical charity began with what was nearest. It depended on individual effort and undaunted love; it used *any* means—illegal ones if necessary—to bring real love to desperate people. But it didn't flout the law, as if that were a good thing of itself, it also *used* it as much as possible, because legislation is the normal way to achieve needed reform. But it isn't the only way.

### EFFECTIVE WITNESS

This is the preaching of the Gospel. Serving our neighbor isn't an extra, it is essential—it is the way the love of God reaches people. Once, the Abbé Pierre went to collect some concrete building blocks from a man who greeted him with a furious tirade about how the Church only cares for the rich and does nothing for the poor. Then he asked what the blocks were for, so the Abbé told him what he was doing. As the Abbé left, the man put his hands on his shoulders and said, "Well, look, after all, Abbé, maybe if God does exist it's shown by this sort of thing that you're doing."

### DEATH AND LIFE

*In the human and Christian economy, people and things must die or else there will be no life, no creativeness. In themselves, change, tension, even strife, are neutral; it is the use made of these forces that is crucial.*

UNITAS



# Books Received

Problems of Christian Marriage  
Rosemary Haughton  
*Paulist Press.* 95c

This paperback reveals the best insights of one of the leading Catholic lay theologians who is wife and mother herself. In six chapters, she discusses marriage, the family, the Christian family, sex education and our neighbor in today's world. These papers reveal her balanced, Christian reflection on sex in marriage; the vocation of the family; Vatican II on the family; authority; marriage and celibacy; hints on sex education; and the everyday opportunities of Christians in their own neighborhood. This refreshing, clear and wise book will win readers for her other books, especially "Beginning Life in Christ," a volume on the gospel and the Christian education of children. (Newman Press)

The Church and Civilization  
Jerome D'Sousa, S.J.  
*Doubleday.* \$4.50

For all its frankness regarding the "errors and sins, the human weaknesses of the Church's rulers" in the exercise of the Church's mission, this book breathes an optimistic spirit. "Today," the author confidently asserts, "the Church can dare to say, 'who sees me, sees Jesus.'"

This reviewer recalls a chairman at a lecture introducing the writer by saying that "Father D'Sousa's ancestors in the 16th Century in gratitude for the faith, took a Portuguese name." The courteous but honest Jesuit painfully responded: "They were forced to adopt a Portuguese family name—and Western civilization as well!" Much of this deplorable proselytism comes through in a highly personal introduction.

Yet despite this mistaken method of evangelization, Jerome D'Sousa, thoroughly Christian in spirit, remained an Indian in culture. He welcomed Mahatma Gandhi, was a member of the Indian Constitutional

Assembly in 1946, and served many times as India's representative at the United Nations. He is thus admirably suited to discuss the relation of the Universal Church to the diverse cultures of the world. At a time when missionaries are often disheartened and when even the Conciliar teachings on missions are difficult to reconcile, the author's informed, forthright yet hopeful outlook is refreshing.

Fundamental Concepts  
of Moral Theology  
Franz Bockle  
*Paulist Press.* \$4.95

This is the fifth volume in the Exploration Books Series which endeavors to treat theological issues in the light of the best contemporary thinking. As with previous books, it is concerned with the moral ideals of Christianity both as an enduring tradition and as an answer to the poignant questions of our contemporary world.

The author is probably best known as the director of the section on Moral Theology of the Concilium series and is noted for his deep interest in ecumenical questions in the field of ethics. He has a sure instinct for the abiding core of traditional precepts and principles and the guidance they give the individual conscience in manifold situations. He centers all this on Christ, man's only way to the Father. "When we delineate the Christian concept of man," he explains, "we mean to avoid constructing a moral theology that takes man as starting point; we must view man in the light of Christ, and then ask ourselves who a follower of Christ is and what he must have in order to answer the call of his Lord."

In developing this central theme, he discusses cogently the Christian Concept of Man; The Essence and Source of Morality; and The Norms of Morality. This reviewer particularly liked his section on "Sinners, Sins and Sinning," which treats

the nature, kinds and sources of sin; the results of sin; and the sinner's return to God.

America's Forgotten Priests:  
What They are Saying  
Joseph H. Fichter, S.J.  
*Harper*. \$6.95

From a systematic questioning of thousands of U.S. priests, Father Fichter can report on their reaction to eight basic areas of a priest's life and ministry. How adaptable to change is the Church in America? What rapport do priests enjoy with authority? Is seminary formation adequate? What opportunities are available for continuing training? What are their working conditions? What are the norms for promotion? What about a married clergy? To what extent must individual conscience conform to official assumptions and policy?

Their answers to these questions are most frank and revealing. And their implications are often surprising. The priestly role, like everything else today, is changing. But the clergy will always play a prominent role in the life of the Church. And it is immensely important to know precisely how priests themselves regard their role and what can be done to clarify and improve their daily life and work.

Secularization Theology  
Robert L. Richard, S. J.  
*Herder and Herder*. \$4.95

On retreats, at Catholic conferences and in private discussion it is only too clear that believers are themselves wrestling with the problem of secularization and its consequences. Vatican II was not a minute too early in endeavoring to draw the line between the extremes of excessive supernaturalism and the excesses of the radical Christian secularizers.

Father Richard addresses himself to the line of thought expressed principally by such writers as Bishop Robinson, Van Buren and Harvey Cox. He does this with sympathy but with appreciation which is in the best sense critical. And he shows a discriminating appreciation of Bonhoeffer and his relation to this school of

theologians, along with the critique of Robinson by Mascall.

The author shows the ambiguities in these writers relative to matters like the meaning of Easter, the transcendence of God, immortality and the eschatological kingdom. Regarding the person of Christ, he points out that writers like Robinson and Cox give the impression that Jesus is to be regarded as "the man for others" with less attention to his divinity, because the New Testament does not "focus on divinity." "There is the possibility here of a very serious and most uncritical oversimplification," the author contends. "Since the question of divinity was not explicit in the New Testament itself, since it became explicit only in the process of Hellenization, the Christian of today may quite reasonably ignore it. But this is simply an anti-metaphysical romanticism." Father Richard does an excellent job in providing a summary of these trends and their influence on the future of Christianity.

J.T.M.

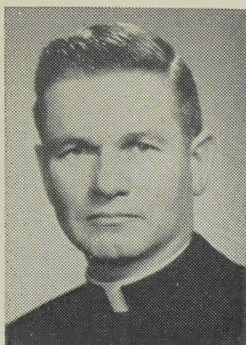
## GUIDE

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## GUIDE

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# Guide Lights

## CRISIS EVANGELIZATION . . .

The history of Christianity demonstrates that times of crisis are privileged opportunities for witnessing to Jesus Christ. Persecution, invasion and exile have provided recurring occasions for dramatic conversion and new vitality within the Church. It seems almost a law of human response that God's judgments and purpose are best made plain when people are shaken out of their complacency by events that appear beyond control. If this be true, then we in the United States today have an unparalleled opportunity for proclaiming the Kingdom of God. The violence that afflicts our cities, the social and racial revolution that is in the making, the deepening divisions within the American people over the Vietnam war, speak not only of death and destruction but also of God's loving presence and purpose. No one in his right mind wishes for this kind of sign or rejoices in it but neither can Christian faith disassociate it from Christianity's God. Believing, as we do, that Jesus Christ is the Lord of history, we recognize that no crisis arises outside of his purposes or lies beyond his control. Believing thus against appearances, the Christian approaches these crisis situations with confidence, searching out the signs of Christ's presence and pointing him out for the sake of others. At times like this, when men's lives are wrenched out of secure and familiar patterns by the pressure of events, the Gospel speaks with special poignancy. It is the announcement of a new order and it appears most relevant when established orders are crumbling.

## ARTICULATING FAITH . . .

All this is no more than an historical judgment about the past if it does not en-

ter into the actual dynamics of a person's response to crisis in the present. And this is not easy. We are not accustomed to articulating our faith in such concrete and violent images. We are more comfortable with propositions. It is much easier, for example, to recognize the truth that "Christ is Lord of history" in its verbal statement than to perceive that same truth in the flaming wreckage of Newark's Central Ward. Yet this latter kind of faith-response is a necessity if we would turn crisis into opportunity. Without it we are apt to respond to such crises with sterile arguments about the morality of violence and dissent. Not that there isn't a valid application of moral theology to such situations, but if we confront crisis only in moral terms we will end up judging the actions of men rather than discerning the presence of God and our assent to the Lord of history will remain largely a notional one.

## EVENTS BEFORE DOCTRINE . . .

An articulation of faith that is exclusively doctrinal is inadequate to discover God in areas not described in doctrine. Yet recognize him everywhere we must for he is at work in the whole world and all of its history. Fortunately, we have the means to articulate our faith in more diversified fashion. The biblical perspective turns us toward events rather than doctrine as man's primary experience of God's revelation. It was in their liberation from Egypt, their trials in the desert, and their conquest of the promised land that Israel came to know God and to serve him after their fashion. It was in the person of Jesus, his sacrificial death and his resurrection that the Church has come to know our Father and the glory he has given us. Doctrine in both cases came later when Israel and the Church had time to reflect on these events and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit set forth what they understood them to mean. Neces-



sarily, there is always a lag between event and doctrine and this is why the doctrinal perspective so often has difficulty with present crises.

### **"BIBLICAL" FAITH TODAY . . .**

On the other hand, the biblical perspective is geared toward event and so has a better chance of discerning God's action in the present. The difference can be aptly illustrated in the case of violence. Violence is indigenous to the Bible and, at the same time, it is abhorrent to Christian teaching. Yet, this is no contradiction. The *event* through which God revealed himself, i.e., the history of Israel with its wars, destruction and exile; the life of Jesus with his torture and execution; the history of the early Church with its martyrs and persecutions,—all these events abound in violence, but the *meaning* which Christian doctrine culls from them is of peace and reconciliation. God can be found in destruction but destruction is not his message.

### **THE OLD TESTAMENT AND GOD'S PURPOSES . . .**

We are disconcerted by the almost casual way with which the Bible treats violence. It is not that the Israelites were insensitive to it; it is only that they were preoccupied with something else. The biblical perspective focuses on events and does very little moralizing about them. Today we must learn to approach the critical events of our time from a similar angle of vision if we are going to identify God at work in them. Doctrine can play an important corroborative role in this but it cannot enclose the event. The latter has its own autonomy which, if respected, can disclose the working of God's purposes. For these reasons, the Old Testament is probably the apostle's best handbook for crisis even today.

### **CONTEMPORARY EVANGELISM . . .**

Thus far we have urged the apostle to exercise his faith on events as well as doctrines. The communication of what his faith perceives in these events is another matter and here is where fruitful evangelization can emerge from crisis. However, as it is necessary to articulate our faith differently if we would discover the faith content of events, so it is necessary to alter

our stereotypes of evangelism if we would make contact in their shadow. The usual image of "evangelism" is of a fervent apostle expounding to a wistful audience the good news of salvation,—a kind of reserved and unobtrusive Billy Graham. However, it is hard to see just how this scene could be spliced onto the scene of riot it is meant to illuminate. No, evangelism has many forms and the favored classic of the lonely preacher facing the heathen is an anachronism in modern America. More to the point is that value so much emphasized by the Church today called dialogue,—dialogue, not in the narrow sense of verbal interchange but in the broader sense of a companionship of situation and experience with the "victims" of crisis. The apostle thus becomes part of the event and hopefully what he has to say about it does too. But first he must listen, not simply out of politeness, but in order to discover the needs and aspirations of his partners, for eventually he wants to show how the Gospel fills them. Dialogue is probably the most effective form of evangelism today and if evangelical results have been unimpressive in recent years, it is due in part to our tardiness in so re-tooling.

### **MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION . . .**

If dialogue is the form of crisis evangelism, then reconciliation is its operational objective. The crises confronting us today are conflict crises. They are occasioned by divisions among men,—divisions that daily grow wider and deeper. Divisions between black and white, poor and affluent, young and old, established and rebel,—divisions that will not go away and which threaten to destroy American Society. This kind of conflict cries aloud for a Christian response. It is not a question primarily of coming down on one side of a social issue (although it will usually call for this too) but of healing wounds and reconciling brothers, something every Christian must work for if he is really a disciple of Christ. In a world where men are more conscious of the value of unity than ever before there has never been a greater challenge to the Church for the exercise of her ministry of reconciliation,—never a greater challenge and never a greater opportunity.

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